

**Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Washington (CHE-WA)
Environmental Justice (EJ) Working Group
Meeting Notes
Antioch University, Seattle
Wednesday, February 15, 2006
3:00 - 4:30 p.m.**

Next Meeting Date and Location

- **Thursday, March 9 at 2:30 – 4:00 p.m.**
- **Location: the Soundview conference room on the 7th floor of the Wells Fargo Center, 999 3rd Avenue, Seattle**

In Attendance

Barry	Morgan	Public Health – Seattle & King County	206/296-4328	morgan.barry@metrokc.gov
Blazej	Nanda	Cascadia Consulting Group & Antioch University	206/343-9759	nanda@cascadiaconsulting.com
Davies	Kate	Antioch University	206/268-4811	kdavies@antiochsea.edu
Diangson	Ticiang	Seattle Public Utilities		
Groves	Kashina	EPA-Region 10	206/553-1687	groves.kashina@epamail.epa.gov
Guyot	Lucienne	EPA-Region 10		
Jump	Emily	EPA-Region 10	206/769-0865	emily.jump@gmail.com
Ketchel	Jeff	Public Health – Seattle & King County	206/296-4731	jefferson.ketchel@metrokc.gov
Miller	Elise	Institute for Children’s Environmental Health	360/331-7904	emiller@iceh.org
Palenshus	DouGlas	Washington State Department of Ecology	425/649-7041	dpal461@ecy.wa.gov
Snyder	Karen	University of Washington	206/616-7413	ksnyder@u.washington.edu
Trim	Heather	People for Puget Sound	206/382-7007	htrim@pugetsound.org
Younglove	Lisa	University of Washington	206/616-3439	lry@u.washington.edu

Introductions and Welcome

Elise Miller, executive director for the Institute for Children’s Environmental Health and coordinator of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment – Washington (CHE-WA) welcomed the group.

Heather Trim with People for Puget Sound announced a one-day forum being held on Wednesday, April 5, at Seattle Town Hall titled, **“Toxics in Puget Sound: Connecting the Marine Environment to Human Health and the Economy.”** For more information, visit www.pugetsound.org or call Heather at 206-382-7007.

After introductions, Elise gave a brief background of how CHE-WA and its working groups were formed. Working groups emerge organically and with the intention of benefiting the whole CHE-WA membership and beyond. The Environmental Justice (EJ) Working Group has remained somewhat amorphous and has not solidified goals and purposes. Through the semiquarterly EJ meetings, however, the group has had rich conversations but has not identified firm directions. This is not necessarily a bad thing and suggests that we are struggling with the core issue of what it means to have government agencies, community-based and environmental-health advocacy groups working together on these issues.

Elise reminded participants that the CHE-WA EJ Working Group is not a community-based group and cannot do what the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) or grassroots groups do, for example. The

EJ Working Group can, however, provide a forum for people who are paid during the day to converse about EJ issues. A good question to ask ourselves: *what is the value-added of the CHE-WA EJ Working Group for the community and field as a whole? Or worded differently, what mutual benefits can EJ groups, environmental health advocates, government representatives, etc find through the CHE-WA EJ Working Group?*

Elise outlined a brief agenda for the day but reiterated that the participants really move the meetings and can decide on other agenda items or directions as well. Elise's agenda included time to discuss goals for the working group and a possible joint CHE-WA/Health Justice Network (HJN) conference on the nexus between environmental justice and health disparities (Nanda Blazej and Kate Davies of Antioch University are working on these issues).

EJ and Health Disparities Research

Nanda Blazej is currently a second-year graduate student in Antioch University's MA Environment & Community (E&C) program and is working on her final change project and thesis research under the guidance of Kate Davies, core faculty of the E&C program and Associate Director of the Center for Creative Change. Nanda explained her research as a way to introduce the EJ working group to the possibility of cosponsoring a conference or workshop of sorts with the Health Justice Network about the link between EJ and health disparities.

Nanda is researching where disparities exist for low-income and minority communities in Washington State in terms of health effects that have been linked with environmental contaminants, such as asthma, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, etc. It has been suggested at multiple CHE-WA EJ meetings that one way to increase the understanding of environmental justice is to use the "health disparities language." In her thesis work, Nanda is addressing the following questions:

- What are the environmentally attributable health effects and health disparities in Washington State?
- What are ways to effectively communicate about environmental justice and health disparities?
- What strategies can be used to eliminate health disparities in Washington State that are due to environmental injustices?

Nanda plans to share her research in an interactive presentation of sorts at CCEJ's annual environmental justice conference on May 13 and also to dialogue with community groups and individuals about strategies for eliminating these environmentally attributable health disparities.

A few group members mentioned that they wanted to talk with Nanda further about research they were familiar with or organizations she should contact for her research. The group was very interested in knowing what patterns Nanda finds.

Additional EJ Discussions and Ideas

Jeff Ketchel, Public Health – Seattle & King County, is looking for people to bounce ideas off when making project decisions that have an EJ component. Currently, Jeff is working on a project that will assess hazardous environmental exposures in childcare facilities in King County. The team will be assessing a variety of hazardous products and/or issues such as carpeting, art supplies, potential asthmagens, etc. This project will assess 400 childcare facilities throughout King County. Ticiang Diangson, Seattle Public Utilities, asked Jeff if there is an advisory group that involved people from the community in making decisions and/or setting up the survey plan. She reminded the group that one big tenet of EJ is involving affected communities in the planning from the inception of a project and at every step of the process. Jeff explained that the EJ component of the childcare project came in late and that this has meant those working in the childcare centers and in the community have not been part of the development to date. He would like to get feedback and help now from the EJ Working Group and others before the forms are fielded.

The group dialogued about possibly making children's issues the focus of the EJ working group. Jeff suggested that children, all children regardless of background and neighborhood, should be considered an EJ constituency, since children, like many in the EJ sector, do not have the power or voice that other sectors do. Others questioned that children from white, privileged backgrounds, for example, should be considered among those experiencing environmental injustice.

Heather Trim, People for Puget Sound, commented that one big challenge she has experienced is defining environmental justice for Washington State. Having a basic knowledge base about what EJ means to this state specifically would be very helpful in her personal and work efforts. She supports the research Nanda is working on although she would like to see some sort of map that shows actual environmental injustices and health disparities. Nanda is not sure that she can fit a map into her thesis timeline, but perhaps she can work on this after her initial research is complete.

Ticiang mentioned three questions that are important to keep in mind when working on EJ issues:

- *Who makes decisions?*
- *Who benefits?*
- *Who is put at risk?*

Another participant suggested working on an initiative creating an EJ checklist of things for agencies to do to integrate EJ in all levels of their operations and programs. CHE-WA is a reputable group and could exert effective pressure. This idea was mentioned at previous working groups and may connect to CCEJ's current EJ toolkit project. Elise commented that the group should definitely get an update on CCEJ's toolkit but that this group should not take on CCEJ's project as their own.

A few members supported a joint CHE-WA/HJN forum. Elise commented that this may be the type of project that CHE-WA can best offer.

Morgan Barry mentioned a grant she is working on that supports "fresh ideas." The grantors are looking for ways that different organizations can leverage funds to collaborate on EJ issues. From the Environmental Justice Needs Assessment (EJNA) work, Morgan heard from multiple community groups that their main environmental concerns have to do with public safety. Her group is looking for "fresh ideas" that will come out of EJNA's work. DouGlas Palenshus, Department of Ecology, mentioned that a potential "fresh idea" he heard from the EPA's recent EJ listening sessions is to work with and through youth to give out environmental messages. Morgan explained that there is a very active youth group in the International District (Project WILD) that partners with non-English-speaking seniors in the community on a variety of projects. She is helping to start a similar youth group in White Center to work primarily within the Khmer community.

Heather Trim mentioned the importance of community-based social marketing tools when working with individuals and/or communities to motivate behavior change.

Next Steps

The group acknowledged that they did not come to consensus on how the EJ working group should move forward although enthusiasm was expressed for continuing to meet. The most support seems to be around a CHE-WA/HJN forum. It is also a particularly good time for HJN to take on a new project as they are becoming more active again and very interested in collaborating with CHE-WA. Elise will invite HJN members (such as June Beleford) to the next EJ working group to talk further about collaborating on some type of forum.

Morgan Barry also thought it might be interesting for participants to share their reasons for being there at the next EJ working group meeting. This may generate good conversations and a stronger group identity.

The group expressed interest in meeting more often and talked about meeting every month or so while enthusiasm lasts and until a stronger identity is formed. Elise will keep the group posted about the next meeting date, time and location.

Addendum

After the meeting, Morgan and Ticiang discussed an idea that they would like to offer for consideration: The CHE-WA EJ Working Group could really help benefit all of us by serving as a "learning group" – modeled after the program Running Grass started – and do "listening sessions," inviting agency representatives to listen to those who are affected. We use the lens of EJ to look at how agency services or regulations might be "gatekeeping," and ways that EJ communities can be better served. This is something that the CHE-WA EJ Working Group could potentially offer better than other entities. To be considered further at the next meeting.